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DESP. NO. 282

FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM: AMCONGEN, Lagos, Nigeria.

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

DATE: June 6, 1953

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REF: Consulate General's Despatch No. 261 of May 19, 1953.

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SUBJECT: Political Developments in Nigeria May 23 to June 6, 1953.

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There has been no noticeable clarification of the Nigerian political picture over the past two weeks. Probably the most important event was the refusal by Nnamdi AZIKIWE and Obafemi AWOLOWO to accept an invitation by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to attend an upcoming conference (date not yet set) in London to consider the type of meetings which should be held in order to revise the present Nigerian constitution. The invitation of the Secretary of State was to be extended to representatives of the NCNC, the Action Group, the NPC, the National Independence Party the NEPU and of the Cameroons; to a total of thirteen persons. The AG and NCNC leaders declined, giving as their main reason, the fact that representatives of the NIP were invited. It should be noted that this party is made up, for the most part, of ex-members of the Eastern Region NCNC who left the party under very bitter charges from both sides.

During the two-day Coronation holiday (June 2nd and 3rd) there were disturbances in Lagos which led to the smashing of glass windows in government and foreign-owned business buildings and slight injuries to three or four non-Nigerians whose automobiles were attacked by the rioters. The damage was done by a few small groups of Nigerians who were protesting the jailing of youth group leaders bound over during the holidays for their refusal to post bonds that they would keep the peace during the celebrations. These leaders of the Action Group and NCNC youth organizations and the Western Region NEPU had applied to the police for a permit to hold a mass demonstration on June 2nd to "mourn the Kano dead," but were refused by the authorities. After the refusal the individuals were taken to court by the police, who asked that they post bond to keep the peace, or that they be jailed in lieu. Upon refusing to post the bond they were imprisoned - to the accompaniment of loud wailings and high-flown statements by the nationalist press in Lagos.

On the afternoon of June 2nd the Convention People's Party of Nigeria attempted to hold, without a permit, a public meeting in the suburb

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suburbs of Lagos. Police raided the meeting and arrested at least five of the leaders and speakers, including Adewale THOMPSON, well-known Lagos lawyer and CPP head. A high government official informed the reporting officer that the police were a little rough in breaking up the meeting; which action had resulted in seven injuries and one death among those attending the meeting. It has been reported that up to twenty Nigerians w were arrested in connection with the disturbances over the holidays.

Northern Nigeria's position in regard to self-government in 1956 remains unaltered, as was made clear by the resolution of the Northern House of Assembly "that the Northern Region is not ready to commit itself to a fixed date for self-government." The mover of the motion, Malam YAHAYA GUSAU, informed the members of the House that several of their colleagues had "collected" the views of the people of the North on the subject and that his resolution represented the concensus. He said, "My motion does not suggest that the North does not want self-government, I believe that freedom is the heritage of all people." He asked, "Is it wise to ask for big things when you are not in full control of little things? Is it not madness to ask for self-government when the ordinary man in the North does not know his rights much more to ask for them?" The Sardauna of Sokoto reiterated that there was no question of the desire for ultimate self-government, but only a matter of the timing. He also assured that any qualified expatriate officer or non-Northerner need never fear that the North would violate their personal rights, and that their services would be required and appreciated in the Region. Only two members of the House, NCNC members from the so-called Middle Belt, opposed the motion. The Northern House adjourned on May 24th after passing a motion calling for more autonomy for the Region. This motion embodied the so-called "eight point program" of the North which had been previously drawn up at a NPC party meeting and which called, among other things, for dissolution and abandonment of the central legislature, institution of an advisory commission to advise the Governor on matters which concern all of Nigeria, and a separate civil service for the Northern Region which would be under complete control of that Region alone. Statements by Northern leaders since that time indicate that they are willing to think in terms of a divided Nigeria and to press for this if the alternative is a Nigeria in which they will be forced to move along at the same pace as the South and in which they would have significant amounts of interference in their affairs by Southern politicians and civil servants.

Leaders of the Action Group and the NCNC have continued to meet for consideration of the stand which each of the parties will

take

take in regard to the forthcoming revisions of the Nigerian constitution and the conferences in London which were announced. There are reports, which the Consulate General cannot yet confirm, that the NCNC may abandon its demand for a unitary system of government for Nigeria and return to its pre-1948 position for a federal country. Under this program, Nigeria would be divided into at least eight "ethnic states" instead of the present Regional delineation. On the other hand, it appears that the NCNC and the AG wish to work out a rather complicated system whereby the powers of these states would derive from delegations from the center and would be responsible to a central government. Both Awolowo and Azikiwe have stated, with a certain inconsistency, that the failure of the present constitution was the result of too much autonomy in the Regions. It is difficult to see just how the new plan will be worked out, but it has been the subject of continuing consultations between the two parties. There is not as much agreement between Awolowo and Zik as might appear, because the Action Group is still insisting that the degree of autonomy of the regions or states must be high.

It was announced on June 1 that the Secretary of State for the Colonies had asked the Governor to extend invitations to local political groups to a conference in London, which conference would consider the way in which revision of the present constitution would be revised, that is the mechanics of the necessary conventions, and the groups which should be asked to participate in any revisionary conventions. Delegates to the London conference were to number thirteen in all; three from the Action Group (including Awolowo), three from the Northern People's Congress (including the Sardauna of Sokoto), three from the NCNC (including Azikiwe), two from the National Independence Party, one from the Northern Elements Progressive Union, and one from the British Cameroons. After joint NCNC-Action Group meetings both Zik and Awolowo announced that they considered such a conference "a sheer waste of our time" and that they declined the invitation. These leaders asked that attendance at the projected conference be drawn from the "government" and legislatures of the various Regions rather than from political groups as such--with the idea that any representatives from the East must be NCNC men, as that party has a majority in the Region. If this basis were used, they said, they would consider the invitation again. Probably the biggest factor in the declination is Azikiwe's complete hatred of the members of the NIP, almost all of whom are men who pulled out or were kicked out of the NCNC in the East. That this party was to have two delegates to the conference was too much for Azikiwe and it is doubtful if he would attend as long as NIP men are present too. Azikiwe publicly stated that inclusion of NIP delegates was a deliberate attempt

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to assure that "loyal friends of H.E. the Governor" would be present at the conference. British officials do not consider that the refusal of the NCNC and AG leaders is final, and hope that some compromise can be worked out to gain their cooperation. It is obvious that any constitutional revision which did not come about with the participation of these two parties cannot succeed in achieving a stable system for Nigeria. One high British official informed the reporting officer that if Nigerian politicos would not go to London for a conference, British officials would come out from London for meetings here. The alternative to constitutional revision is a reversion to the pre-constitutional system of rule via the Governor and local British administrative officers, a solution which would certainly not be accepted by local politicos and would probably, also, be under attack from non-Nigerian groups in the UN and elsewhere.

In the meantime, Nigeria does not have a constitutionally satisfactory government and the Governor is quietly carrying out, through local administrative personnel, the necessary functions of government with little Nigerian participation at the center. The central Council of Ministers, for example, is now functioning with only five of its members active; and with no representatives of the Western Region. This situation cannot persist, and some adjustment must be made. It is hoped that the forthcoming elections in the Eastern Region will result in a government in that Region, a government which can carry out its constitutional functions. Administration of the Northern Region and the Western Region continue as they were before the crisis, but with only a part of the Regional-central relationships standing.

The question of whether or not Azikiwe would stand for election in the Eastern Region was answered on June 6th. The party's secretary announced that he would contest the election in his hometown, Onitsha, Eastern Nigeria; and it is also reported that the national secretary, Kola BALOGUN, will probably contest the Lagos seat which would be vacated by the party chief. If Azikiwe runs for election, and he is almost assured of winning the seat if he does, it should enhance his position in the Eastern legislature a great deal and assure him a greater degree of support from wavering legislators in the House of Assembly. Azikiwe, in all probability, will become the Leader of the Government in the East if he takes a seat and the position of opposition parties would become almost untenable in the Eastern House. The announcement also would seem to indicate that Zik has almost given up the hopeless struggle for dominance in the Western Region; his party has few seats in the Western House and even this small group would be without the leadership of the Chief. There was never much hope that the NCNC could seriously

challenge

challenge Awolowo in Yoruba-land, and if Azikiwe pulls out for a stronger position in theEast it will make the matter pretty final. What will happen if both Azikiwe and Awolowo strive for and attain a seat on the Central Council of Ministers is still very much a matter of conjecture. Agreement between the two on many all-Nigeria matters is not yet a fact and there would probably ensue a great deal of jockeying for power in the Council. It should also make for an interesting situation if and when the time comes to choose a "Prime Minister" for Nigeria, for neither Awolowo nor Azikiwe appear to be men who would step aside for the other in such a contest.

The National Independence Party, to which the Eastern members of the current central Council of Ministers belong, held a conference in Aba late in May. At the meetings it was decided that if the central House of Representatives is not dissolved for reconstitution along more representative lines, these Eastern ministers should resign their portfolios. The conference also stated its regrets at the proposal by the Secretary of State for the Colonies that the federation of Nigeria be made looser and suggested that a local constituent assembly be called to devise a new system which would preserve the unity of Nigeria. It was the opinion of the conference that any weakening of the central government will lead to a hodgepodge of small local units without sufficient power or money to effectively govern.

Indicators of the type of sickness which has come to characterize the Southern local governments are the recent developments in Onitsha (Eastern Region) and in Badagry (Western Region). Party bickering and failure to agree over the issue of the authority of the Obi of Onitsha has led to the breakdown of the Onitsha Town Council. The Resident has now appointed an investigatory committee and put a management committee in charge of the affairs of the town. In Badagry, disagreements over taxes, which had led to riots recently, has led to the complete breakdown of the elected government in that location. Here, too, the Resident has installed a management committee to run the government. Thus, it appears that until the national governmental picture can be cleared up and the authorities stabilized, there will be little effective local government on any but critical, basic matters in the Eastern and Western Regions. It should be noted that the local governments in the North are carrying on pretty much as they have been since the British came to the North fifty years ago, with little reaction to the unrest and instability of the South.

The leaders of the Action Group and the NCNC have attempted to keep all elements of their parties happy in connection with

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the disturbances in Lagos over the Coronation holidays. They have publicly commended the spirit of the young members who participated in the demonstrations against the jailing of the youth leaders, while saying that they decry violence and hope that the transition in Nigeria can be achieved without bloodshed and property damage. Azikiwe, particularly, finds himself with a group in his party which he cannot always control--the NCNC Youth segment are very hotheaded young nationalists and evidently acted contrary to his wishes in going so far this time. Perhaps they would not have felt that they had the support of the party if Azikiwe, and Awolowo as well, had not gone to the pre-holiday court session while these young nationalists fulminated against the British and the court prior to their being sentenced to three days in prison. Jailing of the leaders of the AG and NCNC youth organizations did not, obviously, preserve the peace of Lagos; although there was no mass demonstration. The breaking of window panes and auto windows was done by several small groups of people, none numbering over fifty or sixty individuals, who were chased by the police but had such a high degree of maneuverability that they could not be easily curbed. British officials informed the reporting officer that police and intelligence reports indicate that the NCNC and Action Group youth organization funds were used to pay the demonstrators, in advance, the sum of 4 shillings and 6 pence for participation. However, despite nationalist press claims for great victory in breaking up the Lagos Coronation festivities, the demonstrations were not a success and the holiday events went off on schedule and with good attendance by both Nigerians and non-Nigerians.

Erwin P. Keeler
American Consul General

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